"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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SOME ELEMENTS OF LAND REFORM

By Shirley E. Greene*

Christian rural leadership, both Protestant and Catholic, has grown increasingly conscious of the central role of land use, ownership patterns, and farm practices in the lives of rural people. More gradually awareness has begun to dawn that the American tenure problem and the emerging land reform movement in older and more densely-populated countries of the world are interdependent. We find ourselves in one world, and whatever concerns one country concerns us all. The United States can hardly promote with vigor a land reform movement elsewhere unless there is evidence that we are facing seriously our own land tenure problems.

One of the differences between the domestic and foreign aspects of this common problem of land reform has to do with the numbers and proportions of people involved. In the United States about fifteen per cent of the population live on farms and at least half have enough land to earn a very fair living, if farm prices are good. In the world as a whole, by contrast, more than three out of every five persons earn their living by working the land. Unknown but very large proportions of these suffer from extremely low rates of productivity, inadequate returns for their labor, and persistent grinding poverty. Consequently the world faces a rising demand for more just and equitable land tenure arrangements. This is assuming revolutionary proportions.

These differences mean that methods may differ and immediate goals will have to be designed as between domestic and foreign land reform policy. Nevertheless, there are major values and objectives in land policy which appear to have world-wide validity. Any such program should:

1. Be designed to enhance the dignity and freedom of all persons involved, especially tillers of the soil.

2. Provide security of tenure for the farmer and stability for the farm family.

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* Rev. Shirley E. Greene is Agricultural Relations Secretary for the Council of Social Action of the Congregational Christian Church. Land reform is a topic of growing relevance to church and social leaders, and during the year we hope to share one or two more statements with members of The Christian Rural Fellowship.
-- I.W.M.

3. Result in efficient utilization of the land, labor, and capital involved and in optimum production of food and fibre.

4. Make possible the conservation and development of productivity of soil.

5. Encourage wide distribution of ownership of land and facilitate ownership by the farm family.

6. Aim at units large enough to return adequate levels of living to competent and diligent operators.

7. Lead to family and community living sufficiently above levels of subsistence to allow and encourage healthy growth of educational, cultural, and religious institutions and activities among farming populations.

8. Be conducive to flexibility and experimentation in respect to various types of tenure patterns, landlord-tenant relations, cooperative farming, public and communal land ownership, and the like.

Christians and Christian institutions ought to be sensitive to the growing movement for land reform. The objectives just stated make it clear that some of our most precious ideals are at stake. Translated into Christian concepts, we are dealing with goals of human worth and freedom, justice, stewardship, community, and the life more abundant. To embark on this crusade is to put ourselves in the train of Isaiah who cried,

> Woe to those who join house to house,
> who add field to field,
> until there is no more room,
> and you are made to dwell alone
> in the midst of the land. (Isaiah 5:8 R.S.V.)

And of Amos, the shepherd who preached,

> But let justice roll down like waters,
> and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:24 R.S.V.)

And of James who wrote,

> Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. (James 5:4 R.S.V.)

Land reform is an exceedingly complex problem. In some countries it involves the breaking up of excessively large holdings; in others, combination of units which are uneconomically small; in still others, transfer of title from nonoperating and absentee landlords to operating farmers. The appropriate reforms in land tenure should be accomplished so far as possible within a framework of democratic political decisions made under due processes of law and in a manner that will provide reasonable compensation for the legitimate claims of present landowners who may be divested of part or all their holdings.

As with all worthy causes the land reform movement has its dangers. Against such as these the Christian advocate of land reform should be on guard:

1. Hurried or premature efforts which may only create new problems without

adequately solving old ones. Land reform efforts which fail may cast disrepute upon the whole movement.

2. Failure to give sufficient recognition and consideration to cultural traditions and experiences already available in other countries that pioneered in land reform. This may lead to repetition of costly mistakes and duplication of wasteful effort.

3. The menace of purported "land reform" programs which are really only cloaks for totalitarian efforts to achieve political control over land and people.

Leadership in land reform is primarily a responsibility of governments. Each sovereign state, working within the framework of its own laws, customs, and traditions, must ultimately achieve its own pattern of land reform.

The United States working through its duly established agencies, such as, the Department of State, the Technical Cooperation Administration, the Department of Agriculture, the Mutual Security Administration, and the Export-Import Bank, may be able to assist nations working to institute sound and democratic land reform programs. This country should offer its advice and render assistance as desired, without imposing its culture on other nations and establishing only such standards as are necessary to achieve the objectives of sound land reform.

The United Nations should be in a strong position to encourage land reform among its member nations. Recent actions of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, and the Food and Agriculture Organization are laudable beginnings in this direction. The emphasis on land reform in these agencies of the United Nations should be extended and, by all feasible means, implemented. The United States government is to be commended for the initiative it has taken in the United Nations on behalf of a positive and forthright land reform policy. Our government should continue its effort in this direction wherever feasible.

Farm organizations and other voluntary civic groups can play an effective part in land reform, both in the United States and abroad. Lines of action should:

1. Examine the impact of their policies and programs on the rural family and the family farm.

2. Develop a well-conceived program of education concerning problems of land tenure and the need for reform around the world.

3. Adopt resolutions and programs designed to protect, encourage, and develop the family farm tradition.

4. Encourage colleges and seminaries to develop courses in the classroom and in adult evening classes to increase public understanding of the religious and ethical significance of land use.

Shirley E. Greene

Turning to more specifically Christian groups and institutions, here we can also define a wide range of suitable lines of action. A conference group which

met some months ago, under auspices of the Department of the Church and Economic Life of the National Council of Churches, reported as follows:

1. The churches should support land reform when such action seems essential as revealed by common knowledge or by formal research.

2. The churches should, through their schools and other establishments, sho by demonstration how improved forms of land tenure work, how credit can be adapted to the needs of rural folk, and the place of cooperative endeavors in rural life.

3. The churches should increasingly participate in developing an appreciation of enduring spiritual qualities in rural life and of the importance of the conservation of land resources.

4. Church leaders should lift up fundamental values of special importance to land reform, such as, (a) adequate protection of human rights, (b) th elevation of human labor to a place of dignity, (c) the rightness of equ ty and fair play and the wrongness of exploitation of one's fellow men, (d) the responsibilities of stewardship on the part of the owners and oc cupants of the land, (e) the antireligious nature of speculation in land prices, (f) the wrongness of overdeveloped acquisitiveness, and (g) the immorality of excessive charges of interest and rents.

5. Missionaries should acquaint themselves with the essentials of land reform and land tenure problems of the areas in which they work. They should encourage support for appropriate land reform among their constituencies.

6. Leaders in churches around the world should encourage their followers to establish and to maintain fair and honest relations with their debtors, tenants, and laborers. Christians exert a wide influence when they set an example of what is just and fair in these relationships.

7. The management and administration of church-owned land should be studied and, wherever possible, improved. Churches should review their own teach ings about land and make them consistent with Christian ideals and sound Christian stewardship.

An official policy statement on land reform recently published by the Congregational Christian Council for Social Action summarizes the situation in these terms:

"Two of man's primal longings are his yearnings for land and for justice. In the widespread cry for land reform these two basic aspirations of the human heart are merged. The Christian believes that the 'earth is the Lord's' created for the sustenance of the generations of mankind and that it is God's will to 'let justice roll down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream.' In this faith we call upon governments, religious institutions, and men of good will everywhere to join hands in a determined crusade to achieve the legitimate goals of land reform throughout the earth."

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